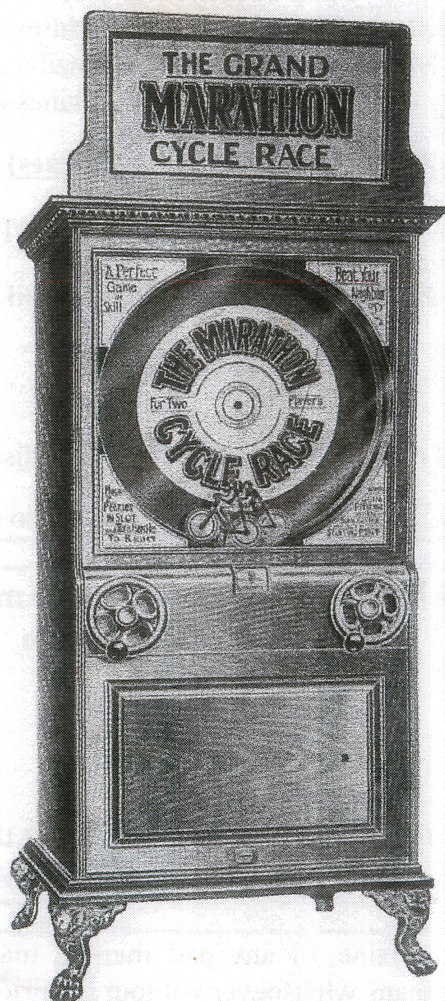


MECHANICAL MEMORIES MAGAZINE

ISSUE 29

NOV. 2009



*The only UK magazine for collectors and enthusiasts
of vintage coin-operated amusement machines*

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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Editorial

Hello again. Now, before I go any further, I should say I've no idea when you will receive this. It is planned for sometime during the week commencing the 10th, but I've had a stinking cold for three weeks now, and things don't seem to be getting done quite as quickly as they should. Needless to say, this issue will probably be packed with more than the usual quota of spelling mistakes!

So how's the auction coming along? At the time of writing, there are still more entry forms to come in, but I'm really pleased with the number and variety of machines that have been entered so far. I doubt whether we will have as many lots as last year, which is no bad thing, as frankly, I think there was far too much on offer then. I know many of you are looking forward to this event, and so am I. So order your catalogue and let's all look forward to the day – I think it will be a good one! See page 6 and 7 for more details

The time has come when I need to appeal for more articles for the magazine. There has been a steady flow over the last few months, which has taken the pressure off me considerably. However, they have now dried up, so if you have an hour to spare, please put pen to paper and make a contribution. It's been some time since we've had a 'How I Started My Collection', so give it a go. You don't have to be a literary genius – I'm not!

Well that's it for now, I must get back to my Night Nurse.

Till next time

All the best

Jerry

News and Coming Events

Carters Auction

I hadn't planned on going to this sale, as there was nothing I particularly wanted, so I thought my time would be better spent in Brighton, earning some money. As it turned out, the weather was crap (Brighton would have been deserted), so I went to the auction instead. It was good to see so many familiar faces; actually, I was quite surprised at just how many slotties turned up.

There was some wonderful fairground stuff on offer, but the slots were frankly disappointing. There were a few nice bandits, but these were dwarfed by the many Aristocrats and Segas that ranged between extremely tatty to extremely average; the same can be said of most of the other machines. One of the star lots was the Bolland Pharaoh's Tomb, which looked very tidy on the outside. Unfortunately, on the morning of sale, no one seemed to know where the keys were, so it was not possible to view inside the machine. Bidding reached £5200, which seemed high, but I understand it didn't actually sell – clearly an unrealistically high reserve.

Other auction news

Two very interesting machines sold at auction recently. Back in September, a Nelson Lee fortune teller working model entitled **The Magician** was included in a fine art sale in Dorking, it made £8400 plus premium. I thought I knew of most of the surviving Lee models, in fact I have pictures of most of them, but I've never heard of this one. It just shows, there are more machines out there.....somewhere!

In October, a very rare BAC cast iron Nestles vending machine was offered in a sale of railwayana, making £5000. These machines are always highly sought after, but this one is of particular interest as it is a double vender; I know of only one other. It was described as 'a superb example in original working condition with keys and a few old chocolate bars.' Yuk!

Bonhams Knightsbridge Sale (18th November)

There are a few slots in this sale, including: Mills floor standing Love Test; Bryans 3 Ball Folks on new penny play; c1901 Electricity is Life shocker by the Imperial Electric Co. and an interesting Bussoz roulette wall machine, 'Miss Universe'. See Bonhams ad. on page 25 for details.

Coventry 08

Well, I think this is going to be a good one! It looks like we'll have 150+ lots for the auction; just about the right number I think. There will also be some interesting goodies available from the sales tables. There are still some more entry forms to come in, but we already have a great selection of machines entered in the auction. Allwins include machines by Whales, Bryans, BMCo, Wonders, Hawtins etc. Bryans machines include Pilwin, Elevesens, Bullion, Fruitbowl, 12 Win and 6 Win Clocks, a very rare Double Top, and we may even have a Payramid (I'm crossing my fingers on this, as the vendor is not sure whether it will be ready in time). Bandits include the usual Aristocrats, Sega, Jubilee etc., Boland Screen Stars, Jennings Governor, and an extremely rare Mills Lion Head. If you're after something bigger, there is a nice Exhibit Supply crane on offer.

As I stated last month, we're back at the Coundon Club again, as I think all agreed it was a very pleasant venue. Food and drink will be available, and of course, the bar will be open! If you're bringing (well behaved) children, let me know in advance on 07710 285360 or email to the usual address, and please, no small children or toddlers.

Now, we had a major problem last year with unsold lots that were flogged off in the carpark after the auction, resulting in a serious loss of commission. Most of you appreciate the immense work that goes into organising these events, and I'm sure most understand that Jeremy and I make very little profit from them after paying the overheads. Please remember that we are running these events for the benefit of us all and that 'there is to be no buying and selling in the car park' means just that.

***So, order your catalogue, withdraw a huge wedge from the bank,
and let's all look forward to a great day!***

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**Sunday 30th November
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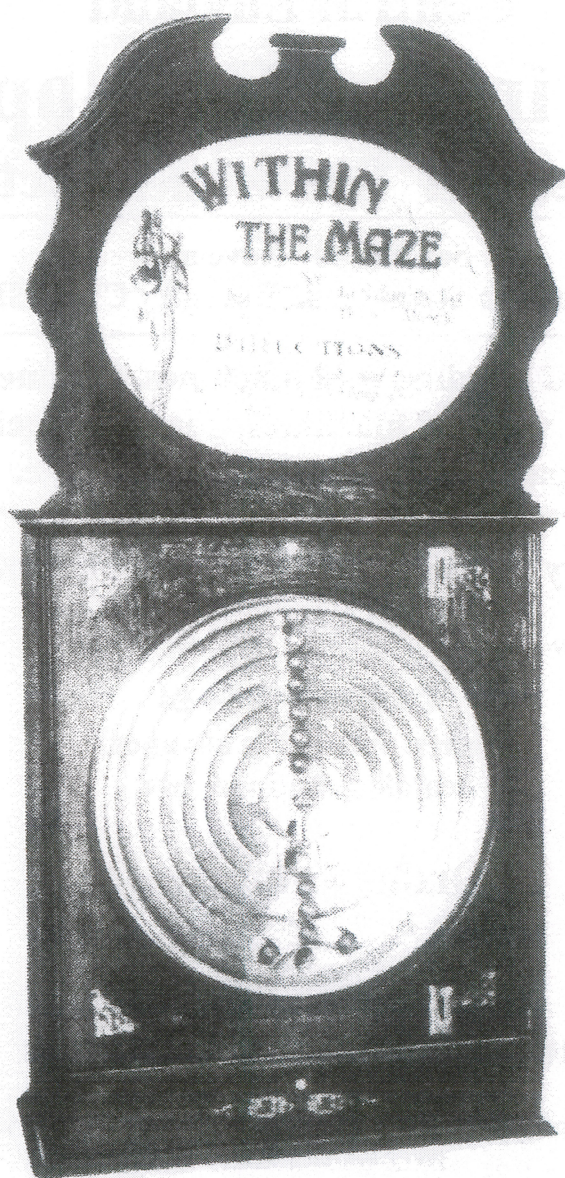
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Charles Ahrens

Without doubt, the name Charles Ahrens ranks among the highest in the echelon of coin-op manufacturers. For over three decades he produced quality machines revered by operators in his time, and by collectors today. Here is a brief account of Charles Ahrens and some of the machines that have been enjoyed by generations.

Nothing is known of Ahrens' formative years, other than he was born in Germany in the late 1860s. Having trained as a mechanical engineer, he emigrated to England at around the turn of the century, and it was then that he adopted the name Charles, having grown up in Germany as Klaus Ahrens. During his early years in this country, Ahrens was employed in the automatic music machine business, but was soon engaged in the automatics industry on his own account, setting up a small workshop at 35 High Street, Kingsland, Hackney.

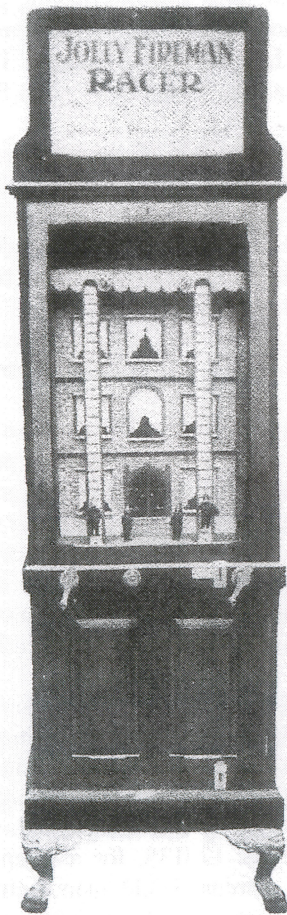
In the period leading up to the first World War, Ahrens' business was principally concerned with subcontracting to larger suppliers, in particular the New Polyphon Supply Company; a business originally engaged in the distribution of German and American mechanical music machines, but who had diversified into the automatics industry. Ahrens may possibly have had contact with this company when he first came to this country, and if so, with an established relationship, may well have set up his small business for the purpose of manufacturing machines for them. Unfortunately, as a subcontractor, Ahrens machines were not labelled or sold as his own, so little is known of his production in this period.

It is clear that from these early pre war years, Charles Ahrens was to become more than a subcontractor. He was an innovator and inventor; a fact evidenced by two patents in his name, from 1907 and 1910, for stamp vending machines, and a later patent granted in 1915 for a revolutionary ball feed device (I shall discuss this patent in greater detail next month, space permitting). Unfortunately, Ahrens automatics business was now seriously interrupted due to the War. This could, of course, be said of everyone at that time, but the situation was particularly difficult for Ahrens due to his German ancestry; he, along with many other German ex-patriots, was interned for most of the duration of the War.

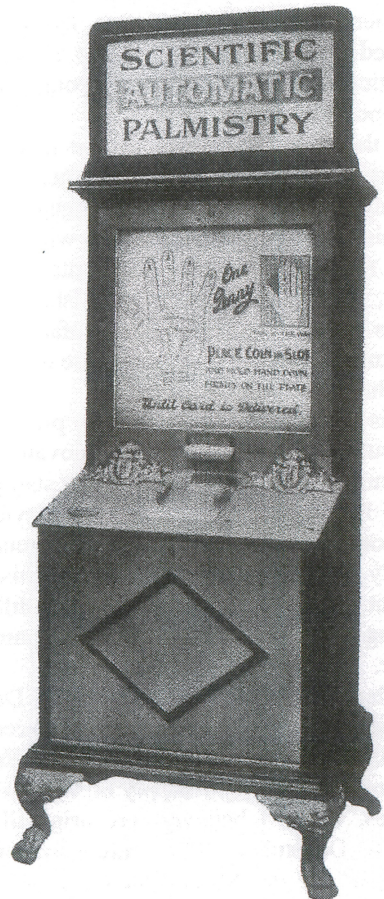
After his release, Ahrens settled in Dalston, where he recommenced his business at 1a Elizabeth Buildings, Boleyn Road. According to Nic Costa, in his Coin Slot articles in the 1980s, Ahrens secured an order from the British American Novelty Company in 1919 for the manufacture and supply of **Within the Maze**. These were large coin return wall machines, which I believe were originally produced by Haydon & Urry in the early 1900s. In December 1921, Ahrens was granted patent no. 173135, for an improved mechanism for the Mills punch ball machines, which Ahrens would manufacture in considerable numbers over the ensuing years. The business expanded quickly, and in 1922 new premises were established at 394 City Road.

From the City Road premises, Ahrens produced a large and varied range of floor-standing machines, including two player race games, shooting games and fortune tellers. Perhaps most significantly, Ahrens started to produce a small range of working models which included American, British and French executions. These machines were made in some numbers, thus making Charles Ahrens the first volume maker of working models.

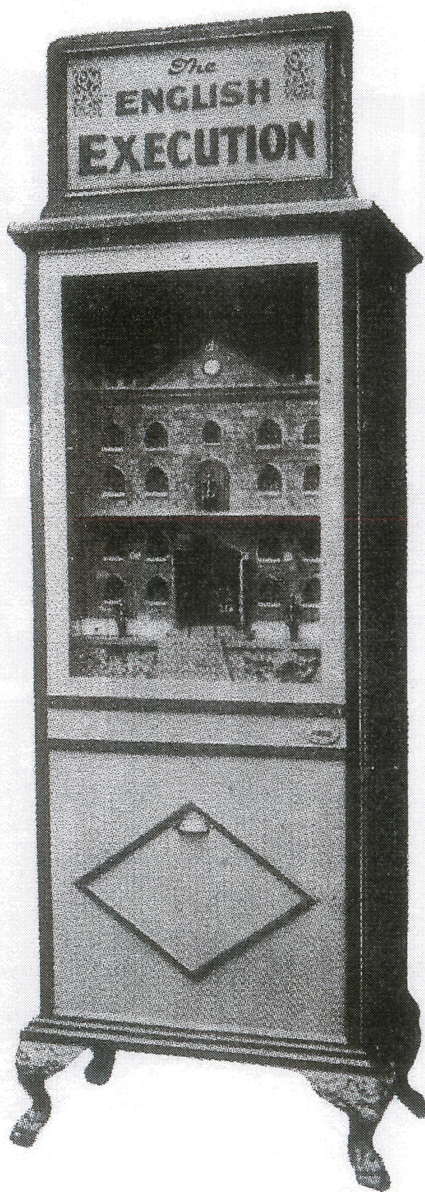
A Limited Company was formed in 1929, Ahrens Ltd, which was then taken over by the Associated Automatic Machine Corporation, whose principal, Clarence Hatrey appears to have been a less than honest man. Irregular dealings on the stock market, particularly in America, led to Hatrey's imprisonment. Ahrens was able to buy back the company, and it was during the early 1930s that Ahrens production was most prolific.



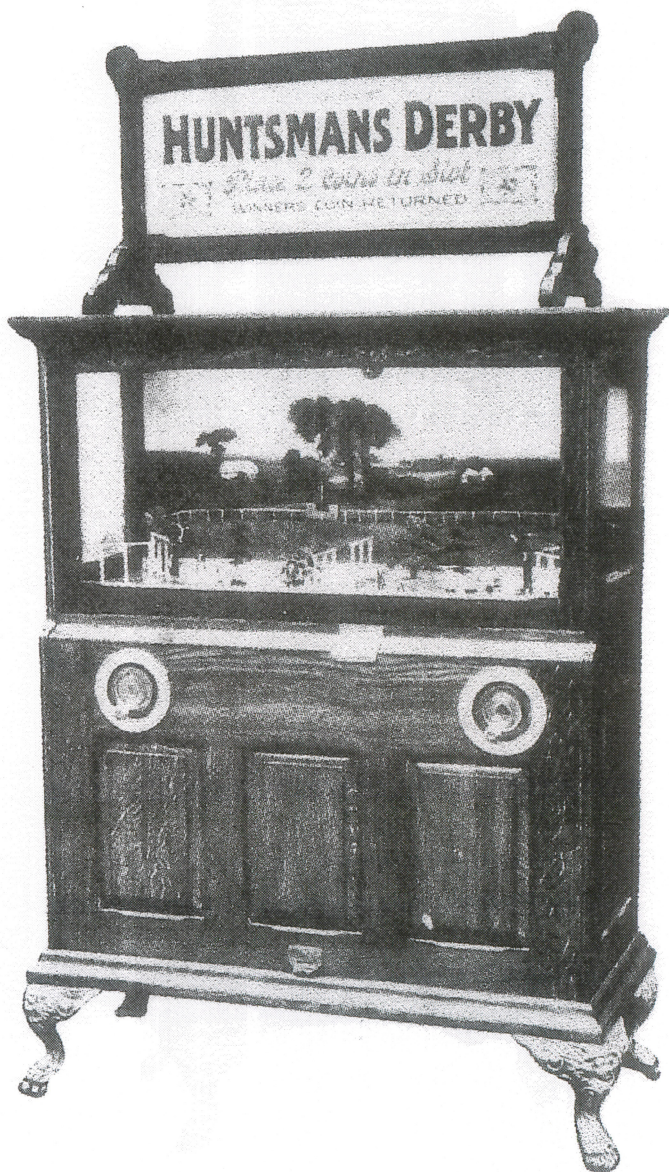
Jolly Fireman Racer, 1921



Scientific Electric Palmistry, 1922



English Execution, 1920s – 30s



Huntsmans Derby, 1932

The company moved to larger premises in mid 1932, at Torrens Street, Islington, and was now one of the largest coin-op manufacturers in the country. The range of working models was restricted to just three: **English Execution**, **Belfry** (or Bell Ringers) and **Our Firefighters**, but must have been made in fairly large numbers, as examples of each are not particularly rare today. Two player race games included: **Greyhound Racer**, **Huntsmans Derby** and perhaps the all time classic two player game **Marathon Cycle Race**. (see front cover). Other machines included the giant **Crystal Gazer** fortune telling machine and **Bubbles**, one of the strangest two player games ever (of which at least two are known to survive).

Charles Ahrens was not only concerned with what we might now consider traditional British games, he was always ready to take up and exploit ideas from abroad. When the pinball craze hit America, it was not long reaching these shores and from the early 1930s, Ahrens was a major manufacturer of pinball machines. He also imported machines from America, and apparently did very well distributing American gaming machines. Maybe his greatest success with American imports was the 'Cathedral' stereo viewer, originally manufactured by the Mills Novelty Company. Ahrens converted the clockwork drive to electric, and although original Mills machines, with the original clockwork drive are now highly sought-after in this country, the Ahrens conversions are by no means rare.

The company continued to flourish, with Ahrens continuing to add to the product range, which included a talking weighing machine. In 1932, patent no. 377878 was granted for a coin-operated gramophone, although whether the device was ever produced is not known. The company received the ultimate accolade in 1933, when they received a Royal visit by Prince George, who is said to have taken a keen interest in the business. However, by the end of 1934 the firm was bankrupt, perhaps as a result of growing American imports, but certainly due to the tough economic climate of the mid 1930s. Stock was sold to Pennimatic of Birmingham.

In a remarkable act of resilience, Ahrens was back in production by July 1935 at his old City Road premises. One of his products was the **Rotary Skill Merchandiser**, which proved so successful that within a year Ahrens was able to move back to the Torrens Street premises. However, the Merchandiser's success was to be short lived, as the patent holder, Leonard Walton, successfully sued Ahrens for patent infringement.

Once again, Europe, and indeed the World, was heading toward war. Ahrens was terrified that he would once again be imprisoned, although he never was. Throughout the war years, Ahrens struggled to make a living but was fighting against the odds. He lived the remaining years of his life in poverty, and died in 1946.

It is a sad reality that sometimes those who make the greatest contribution in their field leave this world without due recognition. Just as Richard Trevithick, one of the great pioneers of the steam age, died in poverty, so did Charles Ahrens. But just as the world has long recognised Trevithick's immense contribution, so do we, as collectors of penny slot machines recognise Charles Ahrens. Eventually, history puts things right.

Unknown Machine Discovered?

By Richard Brewerton

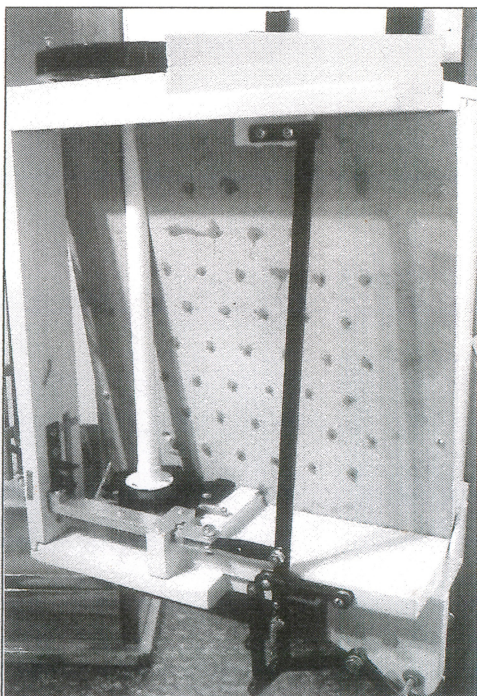
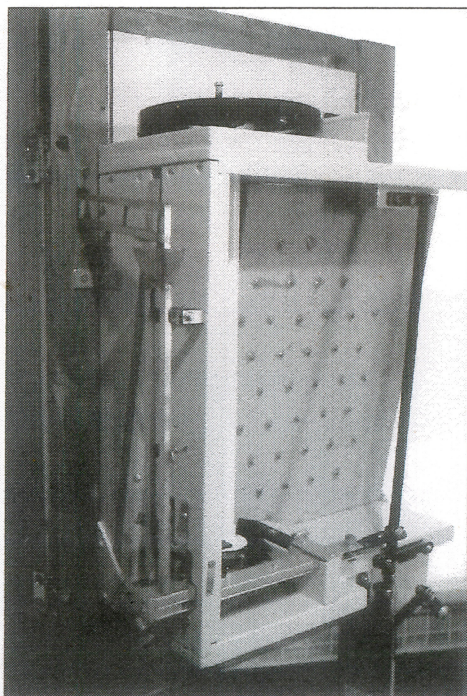
Well no, unfortunately, it's my own home made invention. One day I thought what a great idea it would be instead of having a pot of pennies if I could make a change machine. So here it is, **Penny Falls**. Drop a £1 coin in the slot and turn the knob and ten old pennies are dropped down through the pinfield with a clatter, to be collected at the payout bowl. That way I get to save odd £1 coins which I can put towards future projects. It looks fairly simple, but I had a few problems along the way. I've tried to model it on normal allwin practice as much as possible. The case is a copy of a Whales chocolate machine stained Georgian oak and varnished. The backflash is a picture of a waterfall off the internet blown up to 12" x 14" and the topflash is hand painted on card.



In operation a £1 coin falls down the coin chute and lands on a lever which releases the mechanism. Turning the payout knob rotates a coin hopper wheel which is prefilled with ten pennies in each of eight compartments. It's funny, but although it worked well in theory when I first assembled it, I found that the coin hopper rotated too fast and the coins were being dumped in one lump and getting jammed entering the pinfield. I managed to solve it by making the extra concertina linkage at the bottom of the main operating arm. This increased the travel required at the payout knob and therefore slowed the rotation at the coin hopper allowing the coins to drop one or two at a time. After one complete revolution i.e. after £8 has been inserted, a lever is operated and a red flag drops down in front of the pinfield to warn me 'machine empty'. Now I can enjoy getting change as much as playing the other machines.

My next project that is currently going round in my head, driving me mental, is a Double Decker. I'll never be able to afford to buy a Bryans machine so I'll have to make my own. I've already got two Matchbox Routemaster buses; the rest should be easy.

Richard Brewerton



Two views of the very well constructed mechanism of Richard's Penny Falls

American kids had all the fun!

I reported last month that the Dreamland Trust has now secured the acquisition of the Blackpool whip for the proposed Dreamland Heritage Park, and you'll remember I said that the original Dreamland whip was one of my favourite rides as a child. Now see what I've found – a coin-op kiddie ride whip; if only we'd had these over here, instead of those boring old coin-op horses and cars!

I found the advertisement below in the 1956 Mike Munves catalogue, and although I think it is extremely unlikely that this incredible piece of coin-op fun was exported to this country, I would be interested to hear from anyone who remembers one from their childhood. It would also be interesting to hear from our American friends – do any of these machines survive in the States? If so, I want one! I may be too big now for coin-op kiddie rides.....but never too old!



Word Search

By Laurence Fisher

Can you find all of these well-known machine makers? All found up, down, backwards and diagonally. Good luck!

Bryans
Saxony
Caille
Oliver Whales
Mutoscope
Chas Ahrens
Mills
Bollands

London Automatic Company
Dennison
Bussoz
Automatic Skill
Cresset
Jennings
Wurlitzer
Canova

Z	N	N	T	Q	D	Q	N	Z	M	W	I	K	V	Q	B	Z	Y	J	M
Y	S	H	X	E	G	M	N	R	E	L	L	I	A	C	A	T	Y	O	R
Q	M	S	D	A	G	K	D	Z	T	N	R	S	Y	B	A	G	E	E	O
J	E	N	N	I	N	G	S	O	G	D	O	A	S	H	B	Z	Q	V	A
U	A	V	O	N	A	C	D	S	H	Y	D	V	R	Q	L	N	B	L	E
C	B	O	C	S	Q	F	R	S	Y	B	E	E	M	K	S	V	R	O	O
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S	Q	S	E	L	A	H	W	R	E	V	I	L	O	B	W	K	N	O	Z
I	O	H	Y	M	Z	J	P	M	T	R	S	D	S	C	V	C	S	N	C
R	H	L	T	A	R	W	T	L	S	K	O	I	C	Z	E	I	N	A	R
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U	D	C	W	Z	H	S	R	E	M	L	A	P	P	G	L	K	S	T	S
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Y	N	O	X	A	S	U	Y	O	K	L	V	M	J	E	N	R	B	C	I

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Wanted

Bryans Elevenes or Fivewin. Also wanted Wonders Pools or Win and Place. Must be original. Will pay for transport.

Bill 01642 710834 (Middlesbrough)

For Sale

Exhibit Supply 'flip top' crane (similar to Dock Master crane). £750

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John 01273 608620 (Brighton)

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Ivan 01273 401144

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Most items available

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For Sale

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Unique 'Aeronaut' roulette wall machine, with nice balloon castings on front. Only one known. Offers invited.

Crane case, with mechanism. No jib. £600

Small stationary engine/generator. Engine works but generator needs attention. £20

Vintage Villiers Engine. £20

John 01273 608620 (Brighton)

For Sale

Ahrens Fireman Racer.

All enquiries, please phone.

Les 07986 272509 (Essex)

Wanted

Wiring diagram and/or any information on 'Rotofruit' e/m wall machine.

Tony 01889 565448

Wanted

Derby Day, 1960s electro-mechanical wall machine by Ruffler & Walker. Must be complete and in good working order.

Rob. 01507 473639

Email: robert_rowland2001@yahoo.co.uk

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Peter 01304 822485 (Kent)

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John 0121 747 6842

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Tony 01622 820263

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Tony 07974 460742 (Essex)

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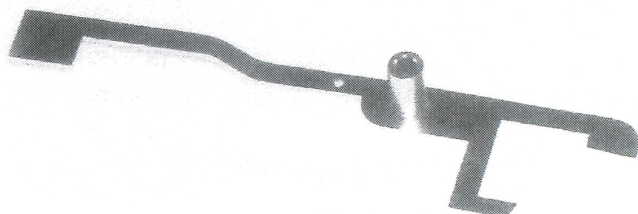
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Jerry 07710 285360

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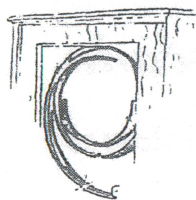
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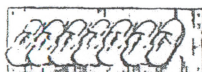
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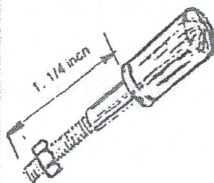
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17½" inside length
Middle 18" inside length
Outer 40" inside length



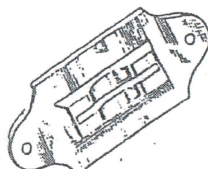
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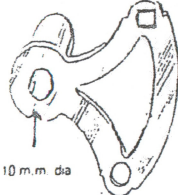
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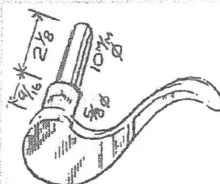
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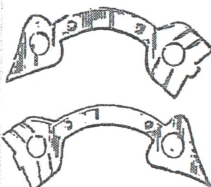
CHROMED TRIGGER
FRONT



10 m.m. dia



TRIGGER



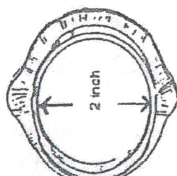
CHROMED ARROWS
Reversible.

CHROMED PAYOUT BOWL

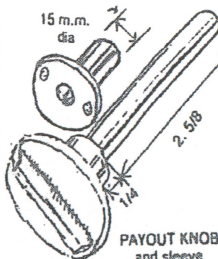


2 5 inch dia cup 2 x 0.25 inch fixing
squares at 3.75 inch centres.

CHROMED KNOB SHIELD

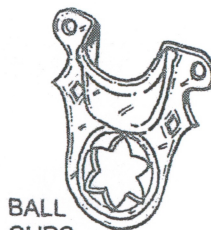


2 x tapped M5 fixing holes on
extended nipples 2. 1/2 centres.

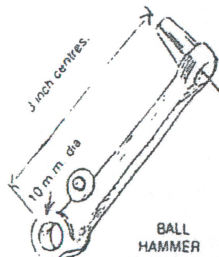


PAYOUT KNOB
and sleeve

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